The GIRL BEHIND the CLOSED WINDOW

BY WINIFRED VAN DUZER.

Morning in the east; cool-lipped Morning wrapping the world in her luminous hair.

Morning rioting on the hills, slow-footed in the valleys; with all her potentialities—smiles, tears, sin, regret, life, death—dragging through city streets, tapping at windows; flinging sighs, like thin, tulle streamers, over her shoulders. Gilding the dome of every clock-tower, glinting along the hands of time on their milling round and round. Rattling derision after milk-wagons; startling greetings; creeping through country lanes. Weaving through a bird's song under a window.

A bird sang under a shuttered window. Dew lay on the fields like diamond dust; a river wound through the meadow; roses vined over the window and the bird sang in the roses. But the window was closed.

A slattern balanced a tin basin on her left hip and leaned to flocks of hens, scattering grain and confusion from the basin. A man clumped toward a barnyard; a younger man followed sluggishly.

"Green, you shut that gate when you go through! You shut that gate!"

Querulous discontent cut the June morning.

"Aw now, maw, I always shut the gate! Aw now—"

"You shut that gate! I got all I can do without runnin' ev'ry time you go through! You—"

"Aw now, maw, don't begin. Aw—" He went around the corner of the barn, muttering. The slattern shambled into the house and began to work noisily, clattering dishes and banging doors.

A veranda ran the length of the house; just beyond was the road, stretching away and away like a gray ribbon sprinkled with talcum. Wagons lumbered along, jarring the old walls; automobiles spun through the dust. They paused before the gate and goggled, dustered men and women asked for water. People walked that way and stopped to talk.

The old man clumped in from the fields and the young man followed him; they quarreled noisily with the slattern. The bird thrilled to the beauty of June; thrilled in the rose-vines.

But the window was closed.

◆ ◆ ◆

TWELVE years behind a closed window; twelve years away from the sky and the winding road and those who travel the road! Does it seem possible?

Grace Marshall was sixteen when she first saw Jasper Yewell. She had a mop of curling yellow hair those days, and her eyes were big and blue—bigger because her face was tiny. And why of all the men on the Maryland eastern shore she gave a second thought to "Old Man" Yewell, nobody knew. Nobody knew much about her anyway. She was the daughter of Frank Marshall, who rented from State Senator Richard Dodson, and who managed to live as comfortably as most of the farmers round the district. Yewell was eighty-seven. He was hoary. He was doddering. His voice climbed dizzily and broke on high words; he was yellow and wrinkled as a shredded wheat biscuit.

They met one day at a picnic. Afterward they met often and then Grace told her parents that she wanted to marry him.

Her mother wept. Greenberry, her brother, raged. After the first thundering "No!" her father said nothing. She pouted. She flew into hysteria and shrieked defiance.

Her father dragged her to her room in the northwest upstairs corner of the old house and locked the door.

"You'll be safe tonight!" he growled.

But she was not safe. Night darkened the fields and then she balanced on the window sill and jumped clear of the vines. When she woke up she was lying in her room with her leg in a cast. Her father watched at the door, grimly.

"You'll stay here for a while, my lady. Trouble enough you made breaking your leg and all. You'll be under lock and key till you learn better ways!"

Weeks flew along. Bones knit slowly and painfully. The window opened on the north; when a translucent bar of red lay across the sill a day was ended. When many days had ended the sick girl heard someone say that her older sister had died. She didn't know that the impression went round the country that it was she who was dead.

◆ ◆ ◆

Evening in the west; Evening stealing, stealing, like a woman who comes uninvited, arms outstretched.

Evening with gray-green eyes; gray-green like the marsh grass in winter, veiled in dusky lashes. Eyes lighted with sunset fire; lighted with pulsing fire, like love. And Evening's soft arms, clinging.

Evening in the west, leaning toward the world. Evening wearing the city lights for a necklace; twining herself with garlands of laugh and song; draping herself in shadows. Whispering; luring the world with gray-green eyes! Wearing through a bird's song under a window.

A bird sang under a shuttered window. Stars powdered the fields with thin light; the river wound dreamily. Roses vined over the window and the bird sang in the roses. But the window was closed.

A pair of yellow lights blinked low to the ground; blinked along the path from the barnyard to the house; died suddenly as a man clumped into the kitchen.

"What're you comin' late for? What're you aimin' to do? What—?"

The man eyed the slattern with disfavor. "What'm I aimin' to do? Guess this is my house, ain't it? Guess—"

"Aw now, maw, don't begin! Paw, what's a-matter with you? Aw—"

The young man quarreled impartially with each. The slattern began to move about noisily. Discord pervaded the old house; penetrated the room of the shuttered window.

Something stirred in the room of the shuttered window. Something stirred uneasily, moving like consciousness which has become instinct. Stirred and moved slowly, close to the floor. That which moved crawled blindly as an angleworm, dragging its body on the floor. Twisted, haggard, hideous body, dragging on the floor. Hands like birds' claws clutching the window, raising the ghastly body from the floor; faded eyes peering through the shutters. Peering through the shutters uncomprehendingly. Stars powdered the fields with thin light; a bird sang in the roses. But the misshapen face turned weakly from side to side, and the eyes were dull. The body twisted on the floor, throwing back black, shaggy hair.

◆ ◆ ◆

Twelve years behind a closed window; twelve years away from the world and those who live in the world! Does it seem possible?

The window opened on the north. When a translucent bar of red lay across the sill, a day was ended. When many days had ended, the sick girl was well again, though because her leg was set wrong she would always be lame. She begged to go out then; the room was tiny and she was sixteen.

"You'll stay here, my lady. Trouble enough you made us all. You'll be under lock and key till you learn better ways!"

So her face whitened and grew pointed while summer slipped into winter. The translucent bar did not often lie across the sill then and she sat at the window,

What Twelve Years of Solitary Confinement Did to Sixteen Year Old Grace Marshall, Whose Existence Was Re-Discovered the Other Day.

hour after hour, watching the gray sky. There was no fire in the room and they gave her no light, so she wrapped herself in the blankets from the bed. The blankets became frayed and soiled, but an odd feeling of unreality dulled her; she felt as though she were dreaming and soiled blankets didn't matter. That was through the day. The nights were hideous. She couldn't sleep. She was afraid—hideously afraid. The dark pressed in on her, weighed on her, choked her. Sometimes she thought the walls of the room were drawing together to crush her. But morning brought light and lethargy.

From the window she saw her mother carried away to the cemetery over beyond the hill. Then she lost count of the days—lost the rhythmic beating of time. She saw her father bring another wife into the house. Three times a day someone brought her food. She didn't eat it. They took everything except the bed and a chair out of the room. And the mattress wore through like the ragged blankets and the bed cracked and crumbled. It was a room of desolation and decay—a grave.

She watched summer come and go in the vines round the window; she tried to pull leaves, but the shutters were closed and she could never reach. Wagons lumbered along the road; goggled and dustered men and women stopped to ask for water; people she knew went by. Had they forgotten her? She was afraid to try to make them remember. Her father was a hard man!

She watched snow drift past the chinks in the shutters; she counted the flakes and thought "when the snow melts I will be free." She watched the snow melt between the chinks in the shutters, and listened to the spring rains beating, beating on the panes. And she thought "when it rains again I will be free." But the sun shone and the rain came again, and she still watched at the window.

Then she began to sleep nearly all the time—excepting at night. They didn't bring her food so often. When she awakened she felt more than ever that she lived in a dream. She counted the boards of the bare floor—thirty-two, and a half board at each end. Over and over she counted the boards of the floor—thirty-two and a half board at each end. She never talked.

She got into the way of not thinking, not moving, just lying still, a haggard, unwashed, ghastly figure, with unseeing eyes. Her father and brother and her stepmother quarreled in the kitchen; life hurried along the road so very near; morning and evening followed each other from east to west; the birds sang under the window. But the window was always closed. And Grace Marshall was twenty-eight!

◆ ◆ ◆

Twelve years behind a closed window; twelve years from life and the possibility of happiness. In this age of progress and justice, does it seem possible?

They found Grace Marshall at last. An uncle remembered that her sister died and wondered where she was; he visited the old farmhouse and searched in the night. The Maryland Children's Aid Society investigated and arrested Marshall and his wife. Grace Marshall is being cared for; slowly, very slowly, is coming back to her habits of thought and speech. Her emaciated body—she weighs fifty-seven pounds—is being built up; it is possible she will live. But the twelve years of solitary imprisonment—punishment meted out to political foes of countries that forget their dungeons—have left a mark that will remain. The shuttered window is always to be closed on her life.

Soldiers Can Hide in Trenches, but Ambulance Drivers Can't

THE war in Europe has its aspects, though all aspects seem to coincide with General Sherman's idea. There's the viewpoint of the soldier from Normandy and the viewpoint of the German wife. Then there's the viewpoint of the ambulance driver who can neither fight nor avoid fighting and who comes nearest to an impersonal part in hell as it rages.

When Caleb J. Coatesworth, Jr., of Buffalo, left West Point last June to join the Volunteer Ambulance corps in France, he enrolled for six months' service. Now he is about to enroll again for an indefinite period—until the end of the war, he says. Coatesworth is the son of District Attorney Coatesworth, of Buffalo, and is twenty-four. Intimate and interesting sidelights on the war come to his friends in his letters. Particularly are the horrors of the situation in France set forth in a letter which he wrote November 4 from Chalon Sur Marne, France, to Norman Kappler, of Cleveland:

"Dear Norman:

"God bless your little hide! Your most welcome letter came tonight after following the wandering of our little band over most of France and then at last landing here. • • •

"If I can only keep warm long enough, I will try to tell you just what our particular brand of hell is like. It is that and nothing less. Everyone is mad and it doesn't seem that there is a civilized world any more.

"As luck would have it, the division that we have been attached to all along has been in the very center of the attacks you have been reading about all along, and hence so have we. The poor devils have been fighting as no men have ever fought before. They started with the big attack on September 25 and they are still at it • • • They are in front of the Tabure and never a day nor night goes by without an attack from one side or the other. Goodness knows how many times the trenches up there have changed hands. Some days there are as many as five attacks. During the big attack with only about thirty cars working, we carried over eight thousand wounded with a mileage of fifty thousand kilometers. Can you imagine what that means? That was for five days (fifty hours, more or less, to a day). Everyone worked like a fiend without rest or food. For the first three days I didn't have as much to eat as you have for one lunch. We couldn't eat. It was freezing cold and pouring rain. Wounded seemed to be everywhere. They poured in over every hill and at the end of every communication trench the ground was covered with poor torn and bleeding remnants of what were once men, lying there drenched to the skin with absolutely no shelter. Every man who could hobble, even if half his foot were shot off, was made to walk all the long, weary miles in to the hospital."

The second day of the attack, the letter goes on, Coatesworth was ordered to try to reach Mensil where they were not supposed to go in daylight. He made the trip, with shells bursting all around and wounded men begging him to take them into the already overloaded ambulance. The letter goes on:

"Every day may be the last for almost any one of us, as we have to make our trips into Mensil regardless of the number of shells falling. You see the Germans know almost to an inch how far it is to almost any place they want to hit, so it is a case for everyone to get as far under ground as possible when things start, or lie in the ditch on your stomach—and wonder why you seem so large. The soldiers can hit for a dugout, of course, but we have to keep going, and many a time when I have seen them light out all of a sudden I have said a little silent prayer.

"Two days ago I was ordered down to Mensil for my turn. I was almost there when I heard a sudden shriek above the noise of the car and I thought that the end of the world had come when two shells burst almost together with a terrific crash in the field beside the road and within fifty-five yards of me. The only thing that saved my life was the fact that it had been raining for four days and the ground was so soft that the shells went down a good way and the sides of the holes sheltered me, but the way millions of pieces screamed over my head made my blood run cold. I hid the car behind a part of an old barn which is used as a morgue and ran for my life. That afternoon over three hundred shells were thrown into that place, two landing directly on top of our dugout, one in the trench directly in front within eight feet of the door and two within fifteen yards of where the car stood. If bullets were the only things used in this war it would be a regular picnic, but when you see the results of shells it is unbelievable. There are men brought in every day, some with part of their heads gone and their brains smeared all over them, one with both eyes torn out and the ragged bloody holes where they had been and only one big hole where his nose and mouth were; some without any heads and legs. The dead, some a month old, are brought in and stacked in piles in this old barn where we leave our cars and then a man and a dog are there night and day fighting off the swarms of huge rats which are everywhere. The whole country is so deep in filth that it is alive with them. Is it any wonder that when you hear a shell coming, you wonder whether you will be the next member of that bloody pile?"

Coatesworth tells about a trip to the trenches that had been the first German line before the attack, where they found postals half written, guns, bombs and bodies half buried by shells.

"We received word tonight that we are going to be relieved in a few days and that the whole corps is to be in Paris for an inspection of the cars and the awarding of seven Croix de Guerre (crosses of war) to our corps for the work here. They said that none of their cars had come anywhere near doing the amount of work we did. I suppose that we will be given a great time, but Paris is not the 'gay Paree' of old times now, and there is too much sadness there to have an old-fashioned blowout. I had a two weeks' leave, but I didn't do a thing except rest and eat my head off. Man, oh man! when I get into a bathtub now I really hate to think of it, as I have only had one wash in almost two months. Every time I take my clothes off now I have to lay a rock on them to keep them there. It can't be helped, though, as there is no water here even to drink, but just enough to cook with. Even that has to be carried ten miles. • • •

"Give my best to every living soul and try to persuade some of them to drop me a line, as it is mighty lonesome out here and a letter is a godsend. Eat some turkey for me, will you? My dinner will be a piece of army bread and a tin of beef. Yours, C."